

3 THE MASTER PLAN

AREA-WIDE RECOMMENDATIONS



The Alewife Master Plan presented in this document is the result of a careful analysis of the goals developed by the Steering Committee.

To achieve the goals, the plan proposes both system-wide and area specific recommendations. It is not intended that every goal will be implemented in all parts of Alewife. Some goals will be achieved through area-wide recommendations, for example, establishing standards for a bicycle/pedestrian system. Other goals, such as promoting Alewife as a location for emerging technology companies, will be targeted to a certain subdistrict or subdistricts within the Alewife area.

URBAN DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS



To respect the goal of better connections, it is important on an area-wide basis to promote coordinated and consistent upgrading of parkways and major roads. For example, parkway landscaping should be designed so that there is a pleasant aspect to the entire procession from Route 2 onto Alewife Brook Parkway and further into the city via Fresh Pond Parkway or Concord Avenue and beyond.

To meet the goal of a more cohesive and livable environment, there should be area-wide height limits and setback requirements to help make a more understandable pattern of development. Building design for individual structures should take into account the interaction of that

design with the whole system of the built environment in Alewife. Otherwise, the “strip” pattern of individual buildings created with no concern for the larger picture will continue to dominate, and the goal of livability will be hard to achieve.

To realize the goal of creating a sense of place in Alewife, a number of steps should be taken to help transform the image from a series of strip developments into a welcoming, unified district. Being on the western edge of the city, Alewife serves as a gateway to Cambridge. The entry points (Route 2, Concord Avenue) should be enhanced to create a positive first impression. Signs throughout the area should be improved. Public signs identifying the entry to the city are needed, and private signs should be much more carefully designed to respect the recent changes in the Cambridge sign ordinance. In addition, the intent of the landscaping provisions of the Parkway Overlay District should be respected throughout Alewife; that is, not only should there be public landscaping along streets, but the private setbacks should also be attractively landscaped. Ideally, in the long run there should be no parking adjacent to major public ways; if there is parking, however, it should be landscaped rather than left as bleak as most existing lots in the area.

URBAN DESIGN STRATEGIES

The means of achieving the Urban Design Goals of the Alewife Plan are severalfold. They are not limited to any one area but rather attempt to seize the variety of opportunities within the larger plan area while addressing the problems of use, form, connection, and access to and through the area that have been exacerbated through time. They recognize that the area is a significant gateway to the city while simultaneously being a part of several neighborhoods, a center for

employment, a service commercial district and a recreational asset.

The plan posits a series of interventions to deal with these complexities. Guiding these interventions are a handful of specific strategies:

Build on Existing Assets

There are a large number of assets in the area ranging from Jerry's Pond to Fresh Pond, from Danehy Park to the Minuteman Bikeway, from solid and recognizable neighborhoods to road patterns that form the basis for a comprehensive street network. Building on these assets will yield site specific solutions that fortify and supplement the existing structure of the area rather than imposing insensitive generic plan solutions upon it.

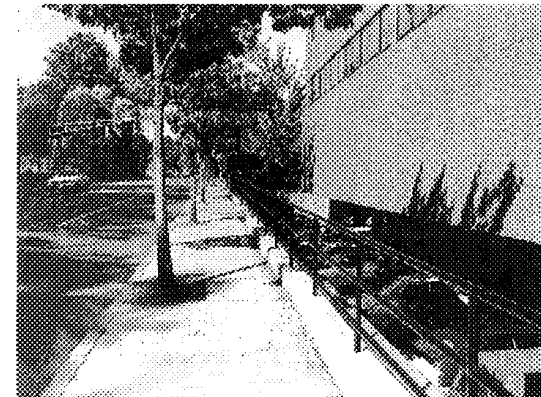
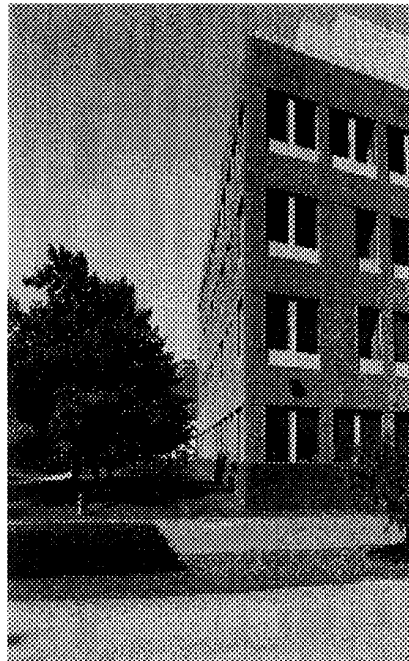
Make Wholes that are Greater than the Sum of the Parts

The strategies of building on existing assets and remedying subdistrict specific issues are proposed in the context of the area as a gateway to the city and the understanding that areas of concern cross subdistrict boundaries. Interventions should at once deal with each area individually and in full recognition of the comprehensive image and linked systems it will necessarily incorporate.

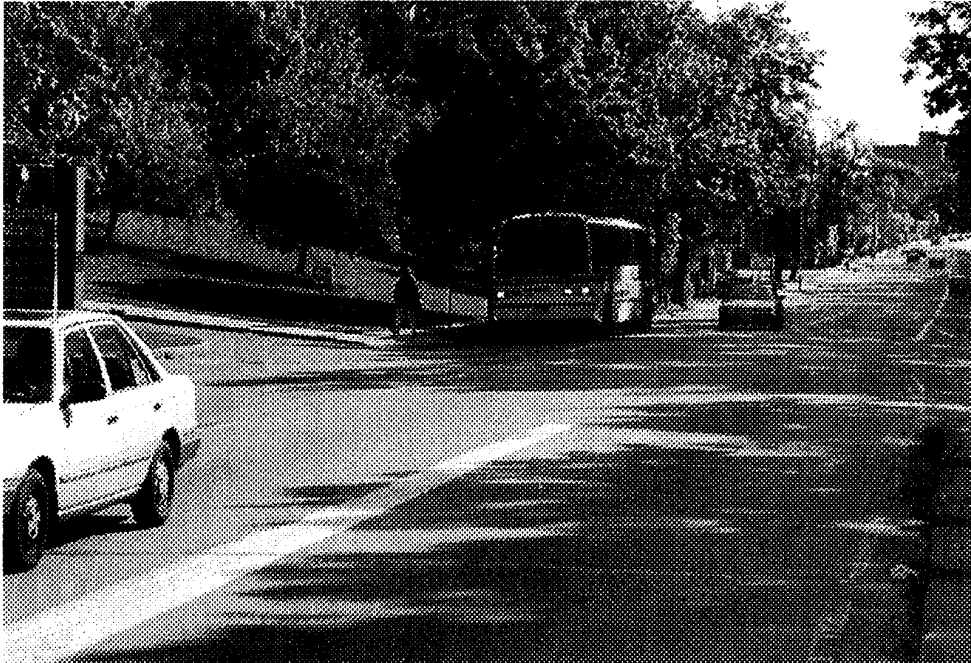
Intervene Realistically

The federal dollars that marked urban programs in the 1970s and 1980s have to a large extent dissipated and are not likely to be available again due to federal budget deficits. Likewise, lending institutions are more reluctant to participate in large scale speculative development, and the City is not in a position

to take on major land acquisition or subsidy programs. An urban design plan must therefore rely on strategic interventions with, perhaps, modest capital investments, public-private partnerships and regulatory rather than fiscal stimulative devices to guide development along desired lines. Any plan should assume nominal public expenditure and should operate within state enabling statutes if it is to be realized.



TRANSPORTATION RECOMMENDATIONS



ROADWAY CONNECTIONS

In order for Alewife to function as both an integrated part of the city and as an imageable district, usable connections need to be made to the surrounding neighborhoods, as well as between and within the subdistricts.

Recommendations for specific ways to make these linkages, portrayed in the accompanying map, are discussed under the area recommendations that follow, but it is important to recognize that transportation is a system. The intent of creating connections is not to increase road capacity, but rather

to enable people to get to and around Alewife safely and easily. This also addresses the urban design goals of creating better connections, a more cohesive and coherent environment, and a greater sense of place.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

One of the goals of the Master Plan is to promote the use of public transportation.

The most important transit improvement for the area would be to provide a better connection from the Quadrangle area to the Alewife Red Line Station. The Fitchburg Mainline Railroad right-of-way constitutes a physical barrier prohibiting pedestrian, bicycle, and shuttle bus access to Alewife Station. This problem could be solved by linking Smith Place with CambridgePark Drive across the railroad. Provision of such a connection is not intended to increase road capacity, but rather to provide more direct access for transit uses and accommodate internal circulation. Use of this connection could be restricted to buses, shuttle vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians, vanpools, and maybe carpools.

This improvement was first proposed in the 1970s as Alewife Boulevard. This new plan does not envision the new road and crossing to be on that grand scale, but rather to be an improved roadway, where the primary function of the connector between the Triangle and the Quadrangle is as a public transportation, bicycle, and pedestrian facility.

At the State level, the MBTA should expand and improve the feeder bus network to the Alewife Station. This would include, but not be limited to, implementing new bus routes to the Alewife MBTA Station from Waltham and Waverly Square via Belmont. These routes were originally recommended in the MBTA's Northwest Corridor Bus Study

conducted in conjunction with the Red Line Extension. However, due to opposition from Belmont, they were never implemented.

The MBTA and the MHD (Massachusetts Highway Department) should construct parking facilities along Route 128 and beyond with shuttle buses running to Alewife Station.

The addition of a commuter rail stop at Alewife has been in demand for many of the businesses in the area, as it would provide a benefit to their employees. The commuter rail station could have the added advantage of creating a pedestrian connection across the railroad tracks, as it would need to be accessible from both the Quadrangle and the Triangle.

A major public transportation improvement for the area would be regular shuttle bus service connecting primary destination points, such as the MBTA station, commuter rail station, shopping center, and major employers. The CambridgeSide Galleria shuttle has proven an effective and much-used system for East Cambridge.

NEW MODES OF TRANSPORTATION

Electric vehicles and alternative fuel vehicles are being looked at in cities around the country and around the world as cleaner alternatives to the traditional automobile. A pilot program is being launched in the Boston area for commuters to lease electric vehicles and drive them to commuter stations, where the vehicles will be recharged during the day while the commuters are at work. One of the experimental locations is the Alewife MBTA station. The program is being sponsored by the State Division of Energy Resources, the Massachusetts Highway Department, and the Massachusetts American Automobile Association.

The use of electric vehicles demands additions to the infrastructure, such as recharging stations. In 1993, a local group of architects, engineers, and planners, won a national award for their vision of Cambridge in the year 2008; their vision begins in the Alewife area.

New buildings and parking facilities in Alewife should be designed so as to accommodate this new transportation form in the future. Refueling facilities for other alternative fuels should also be considered for the area. When shuttle buses are established in Alewife, they may be in the form of electric or alternative fuel vehicles.

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN SYSTEM

The primary goal for the bicycle and pedestrian system is the improvement of pedestrian and bicycle facilities so that walking and cycling are not merely accommodated, but are encouraged. Safe, convenient and clear connections between all sections of Alewife for pedestrians and cyclists are key elements to making the entire area work as a whole. The environment should be pleasant and appealing so as to entice people to walk; this counts for walks to and from transit stations, lunchtime errands, or general leisure strolling. By the same token people should feel comfortable cycling along the roads in the entire area. For some of the distances that are perceived to be above the walking threshold, a bicycle ride would prove a quick trip. Reasonable bicycle commuting distance can be assumed to be 5 miles or 30 minutes. This would reach most of Cambridge, and much of Somerville, Arlington, Belmont. There are also people who live within walking commuting distance in Cambridge, Arlington and Belmont.

PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES AND AMENITIES

Although the issues around establishing good pedestrian environments could constitute their own master plan, there are some basic elements that are essential; these are outlined here.

Sidewalks, Landscaping, Street furniture

Aside from the basic minimum standards that have been established regarding handicap access (4' clearance between street furniture and other edges such as a building or landscaping), sidewalk widths should be determined by anticipated pedestrian flows. Suggested sidewalk widths for the Alewife area are 8-15 feet. The addition of trees and greenery to this area will be a significant plus. As many trees as can be accommodated should be planted. Other greenery can be an amenity, but wide front lawns are not encouraged, as this tends to isolate the buildings that are set back. Street furniture - lighting, benches, signs, trash receptacles - should be scaled and sited with the pedestrian in mind. Certain elements should also be geared to the bicyclists (especially signage).

Active street use

In order to create a pedestrian-oriented and pedestrian-friendly environment, building setbacks should not be too great. Ground floor retail use is being encouraged along the primary pedestrian ways (CambridgePark Drive, Alewife Brook Parkway). All buildings should have doors and windows on the street and there should be no blank facades (this is addressed also in Urban Design requirements). Parking should be located behind or to side of buildings

Destinations

Pedestrian-oriented destinations (i.e. places to walk to) are important, e.g. restaurants, places to do errands.

Stopping places

People should have places to stop along the way that make the walk more enjoyable. This includes pocket parks, places to sit, shady spots under a tree but in view of the mainstream.

BICYCLE FACILITIES AND AMENITIES

Travelling

In Alewife, as in the rest of the city, all new and reconstructed roads will be required to accommodate bicyclists. How this is done will depend on the road type (arterial, secondary, etc.), anticipated motor vehicle traffic patterns, and available right-of-way. Potential bicycle accommodations include bicycle tracks (physically separated rights-of-way exclusively for

bicycles), bicycle travel lanes (striped lanes within street right-of-way) and wider outside lanes (where traffic volumes are low).

Parking

Bicycle parking facilities should be provided at every travel destination. Particular attention should be given to major destinations such as the commuter stations and retail facilities.

